

The primary goal of a person of small spiritual scope is the highest *worldly* goal, for rebirth in the higher realms is desirable only relative to rebirth in the lower realms. Having understood the perishable and fleeting nature of this lifetime, practitioners of the small scope are not merely concerned with the happiness of this life but mainly with the happiness of future lives.

Therefore, since Buddhist teachings are designed to lead practitioners towards *at least* experiencing happiness in future lifetimes, they are not actually geared towards those who are primarily interested in the happiness of this life.

The main practice of a person of small spiritual scope is meditation on the precious human rebirth, impermanence and death, the suffering of the lower realms, and karma. Meditation on karma mostly pertains to the practice of refraining from engaging in the ten non-virtues.

The main practices of a person of intermediate spiritual scope comprise meditation on the four noble truths and the twelve links.

Practitioners of great spiritual scope primarily meditate on Bodhicitta and the six perfections.

However, it is important to understand that despite the threefold category of Buddhist goals, these goals are not completely separate, with divergent paths that take the individual practitioners in different directions. The paths of the three types of person rather follow from one another, with practitioners gradually reaching the first two goals one after the other before reaching the third goal of Buddhahood.

Therefore, the paths of the person of small and intermediate spiritual scope are included in the paths of the person of great spiritual scope, which is why the teachings of the first two scopes are also part of the teachings of the third scope.

Hence, the paths of the small and intermediate scope function as a preparation and are an integral part of the paths of the great spiritual scope, i.e. of the Mahayana paths.

Regarding the two causes for taking refuge (fear and faith), they are different for each of the three persons.

Persons of small spiritual scope

Practitioners of small spiritual scope fear the suffering of the lower realms and have faith that the three Jewels can protect them from such suffering and lead them to rebirth in higher realms.

Persons of intermediate spiritual scope

Practitioners of intermediate spiritual scope have fear of experiencing Samsaric suffering and have faith that the three Jewels can lead them to self-liberation from such suffering.

Persons of great spiritual scope

Practitioners of great spiritual scope fear the suffering of all sentient beings and have faith that the three Jewels can lead them to Buddhahood so that they can be of the greatest benefit to all sentient beings.

Even in our ordinary day to day life fear and faith are the driving forces for taking refuge in worldly, ordinary objects of refuge. For example, when we take refuge, i.e. entrust ourselves in and rely on a doctor, we do so because we are afraid of sickness and have the faith or confidence that the doctor can help us.

Therefore, the stronger and firmer our fear and faith are, the stronger and firmer our refuge becomes.

THE REASON WHY THE THREE JEWELS ARE WORTHY TO BE A REFUGE

In the *Lam Rim Chenmo* (*The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*) Lama Tsongkhapa gives an extensive explanation of why the three Jewels are worthy objects of refuge.

The *Lam Rim Chenmo* starts that explanation by citing four reasons that are given by Asanga in his *Compendium of Determination* (*Viniscaya-Samgrahani*) for why the Buddha Jewel is a worthy object of refuge:

- 1) The Buddha has attained the sublime state of fearlessness
- 2) The Buddha is an expert in training disciples
- 3) The Buddha has great compassion
- 4) The Buddha is not pleased with material offerings, but with offerings of practice

1) *The Buddha has attained the sublime state of fearlessness*

The Buddha has overcome all shortcomings, i.e. he has eliminated afflictive and cognitive obstructions. Therefore, he is able to lead other sentient beings to the same state of complete enlightenment. The analogy for this is a person who has freed himself from a swamp and is now able to pull out everyone else trapped in the swamp.

2) *The Buddha is an expert in training disciples*

Since the Buddha is omniscient he is the most qualified and skillful teacher, for he is able to lead each sentient being to enlightenment in the fastest possible way.

3) *The Buddha has great compassion*

Just as sentient beings are under the control of ignorance and other afflictions, the Buddha is under the control of great compassion. Therefore, he works tirelessly and impartially for the benefit of all sentient beings.

4) *The Buddha is not pleased with material offerings, but with offerings of practice*

Having attained liberation from all shortcomings, and thus being most skillful and greatly compassionate the Buddha's only aspiration is to lead all sentient beings to complete enlightenment. However, he does not delight in sentient beings expressing their gratitude by merely prostrating, praising him, or making material offerings. What pleases the Buddha most is sentient beings' practice – he is most pleased when we actually implement what he teaches.

Only a Buddha possesses these four qualities. However, in order to develop strong confidence and faith in the Buddha it is extremely important to examine and contemplate these qualities.

Furthermore, according to the ***Compendium of Determination***, if we generate strong confidence and faith in the Buddha we come to see him as a worthy object of refuge. This in turn enables us to also regard his teachings and his spiritual community as worthy of being a refuge.

THE WAY TO TAKE REFUGE

According to Asanga's ***Compendium of Determination*** there are four aspects of taking refuge:

1. By knowing the good qualities (of the three Jewels)
2. By knowing the distinctions (of the three Jewels)
3. Through commitment
4. By refusing to acknowledge other refuges

1. The way to take refuge by knowing the good qualities (of the three Jewels)

This category requires recalling the good qualities of each of the three Jewels. Therefore there are three subcategories:

- i. The good qualities of the Buddha
- ii. The good qualities of the Dharma
- iii. The good qualities of the Sangha

i. The good qualities of the Buddha

Actually, for sentient beings it is impossible to accurately comprehend the good qualities of the Buddha. This is why Maitreya says in his ***Uttaratantra (Sublime Continuum)***:

*Because he has transcended the world,
Our worldly comparisons miss their mark.
So we use whatever seems similar
To the true character of the Tathagata.*

Nonetheless, we should try at least get a sense for the outstanding qualities of the Buddha. Therefore, there are four subtopics that describe the good qualities of the Buddha:

- 1) The good qualities of the Buddha's body
- 2) The good qualities of the Buddha's speech
- 3) The good qualities of the Buddha's mind
- 4) The good qualities of the Buddhas enlightened activities

